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Sorting through found weapons

Army Lt. Col. Steve Russell, commander of the 1st Battalion, 22nd Regiment of the 4th Infantry Division sorts through ordnance, weapons and explosive timers Thursday that were found on a patrol in Tikrit, Iraq. The ordinance was discovered after intelligence was received from Iraqi sources.

MURAD SEZER/AP



Iraq commander says more international troops needed

Sanchez: U.S. can't add border, road patrols to duties

BY D'ARCY DORAN

The Associated Press

BAGHDAD, Iraq — As Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld arrived in Iraq on Thursday to see first hand the problems facing the U.S.-led occupation force, the top American commander in the country said more international troops could help stave off threats ranging from al-Qaida terrorists and Iranian fighters to brewing ethnic and religious conflict.

U.S. Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez, commander of coalition forces in Iraq, told a news conference that he had enough soldiers to accomplish the mission given to him by Washington. But he said the scope of that mission did not now include guarding the country's porous borders or its thousands of miles of highways.

He told reporters last week that it was impossible for coalition forces to defend the full length of pipeline that pumps the country's lifeblood oil.

On Thursday, he warned that international forces were needed to reinforce existing coalition forces in tackling looming security threats, including possible conflict between the country's rival Sunni and Shiite Muslims sects.

"If a militia, or an internal, conflict of some nature were to erupt ... that would be an additional security challenge out there that I do not have sufficient forces for," Sanchez said.

"There are security challenges that are looming in the future that will require additional forces, and those are issues that with the coalition, and with time, can be resolved," he said.

However in Washington, Gen. Richard Myers, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told reporters that the reason more international troops were needed in Iraq was not because the current force needed help with security but because there is a need to counter the impression among Iraqis that the occupation is strictly an American operation.

"This has an awful lot to do with the Iraqi people and how they perceive coalition forces. I think the last thing we want is for them to believe this is a mission of the United States. It's much bigger than that."

The generals spoke as Washington pushed a new U.N. resolution aimed at persuading more nations to contribute troops.

A chief architect of U.S. invasion, Rumsfeld was credited with the decision of sending a force less than half the size of what the Pentagon deployed in 1991 for the first Gulf War. However, the objective of this mission — occupying the entire country — was more ambitious than 12 years ago when the United States sought only to drive Iraqi forces from Kuwait.

"I have communicated very clearly to Central Command ... and to senior leadership that has come through here, that I do not need additional U.S. forces," Sanchez said. "Clearly, I have also

stated that if coalition forces were to be offered, we would gladly accept them."

Fresh forces — including those from Muslim countries — were welcome, but whatever form the multinational force eventually takes, it should stay under direct U.S. command, he said. He said special care would be taken when deciding to deploy promised Turkish forces to ensure they don't inflame tensions with the Kurds in the north.

The newly named Iraqi foreign minister said no troops should be used from any of Iraq's neighbors.

"It is advisable that none of Iraq's neighboring countries participate in peacekeeping missions because they may carry with them their own political agenda that may lead to tension and destabilization. This applies to all neighboring countries," Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari told The Associated Press.

Also Thursday, Sanchez said U.S. troops would force the Badr Brigade, a Shiite Muslim militia, to disarm if reports of its reactivation proved true.

The Badr Brigade is the armed wing of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq. U.S. troops ordered the brigade disarmed and disbanded early in the occupation. But on Wednesday, Abdel-Aziz al-Hakim — a member of the U.S.-picked Governing Council and brother of Ayatollah Mohammed Baqir al-Hakim, who was killed in last week's Najaf car bombing — suggested the militia had rearmed to provide security for Shiites.

Lawmakers: U.S. should keep control in Iraq

SANDRA JONTZ
Stars and Stripes

ARLINGTON, Va. — While the United States should appeal for and accept any military help offered by the United Nations to share force and a presence in Iraq, the U.S. military should not give up its operational lead in the rebuilding and security of the nation, said two congressmen following meetings Thursday with defense officials.

"We need to bring the U.N. into this," Sen. Tom Davis, R-Va., said Thursday during a Pentagon press briefing.

The topic of a resolution seeking U.N.-sanctioned military force is hot now for the Bush administration.

"I met with [Iraqi] leaders who want the United States to lead, though the U.N. is welcomed," Davis said. "The anxiety on their part is that we would lose control."

Rep. Pete Hoekstra, R-Mich., echoed the opinion, saying the United Nations should not have operational control.

The pair was part of a four-person, bipartisan congressional delegation which spent three days in Iraq in mid-August, visiting the cities of Baghdad, Tikrit, Kirkuk and Mosul.

The responsibility to rebuild Iraq is a worldwide one to be shared by all nations, Davis said.

"I think it's an international responsibility," Davis said. "The world looked away for 30 years ... from the shootings, murder, tortures, gassings. It's not our sole responsibility."

And, if the Pentagon were to ask Congress for an extra \$60 billion to \$70 billion, an anticipated amount reported Thursday by news agencies, in a supplemental bill to fund the mounting costs surrounding operations in Iraq, Davis said he foresees fellow lawmakers passing such a bill.

"I think it would pass, as long as it was clean and they don't [mess] it up with a lot of add-ons," Davis said.

"We are committed to what we are doing," Davis said. "We have to be. To pull out would have lasting consequences that would be felt by the planet for generations."

On the House side, Hoekstra said a Defense Department request for more money likely would be approved, after careful review by lawmakers, in order to let the U.S. military and government continue with efforts to rebuild the nation.

"A pullout is not an option. Doing it cheap is not an option," Hoekstra said. "And now is not the time to do it half-hearted."

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News tracker: What's new with old news

Nation

FCC ownership rules: In a break for small media companies fearful of industry consolidation, an appeals court blocked new federal rules that would relax restrictions on how many TV stations a company can own and lift a ban on owning newspapers and broadcast outlets in the same city.

Critics of the Federal Communications Commission rules say the industry overhaul would create a media landscape in which control over what people see, hear and read is in the hands of a few giant companies.

In an emergency stay, the 3rd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals sided with a coalition of media access groups that claimed its members could suffer irreparable harm if the rules went into effect.

Blackout investigation: The head of the Ohio utility that has been at the center of the blackout investigation told a congressional hearing Thursday that a combination of events over a broad area triggered the nation's worst blackout.

FirstEnergy Corp. Chairman H. Peter Burg strongly rejected suggestions that a series of high voltage line failures in his company's system should be singled out as a cause. "Our system was still stable" after those outages, he told the lawmakers.

Burg was the opening witness at a hearing by the House Energy and Commerce Committee a day after the panel released transcripts showing technicians in the FirstEnergy control center confused and uncertain of what was happening when the lines began to trip Aug. 14.

Several state and regional officials also testified Wednesday, including Gov. Bob Taft of Ohio, Gov. Jennifer Granholm of Michigan and Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick.

Mobster's brother sentenced: A younger brother of fugitive mobster James J. "Whitey" Bulger was sentenced to six months in federal prison Wednesday for lying to authorities about his contacts with the outlaw.

John "Jackie" Bulger, 65, also received three years' probation, the first six months of which must be served in home confinement, and was fined \$3,000. He pleaded guilty in April to perjury and obstruction.

Another Bulger brother, William M. Bulger, resigned under fire as president of the University of Massachusetts last month over his own contacts with his mobster brother.

Ten Commandments: A federal judge has dismissed a lawsuit seeking to return a 5,300-pound Ten Commandments monument to the lobby of the Alabama Judicial building.

The lawsuit was filed by three Alabama residents who claimed that moving the monument, state court officials unconstitutionally established the religion of nontheistic beliefs.

U.S. District Judge Myron Thompson ruled Thursday that the removal of the monument, which he had ordered, did not violate the Constitution.

"The empty space of nothingness in the rotunda of the Judicial Building is neither an endorsement of 'nontheistic belief' nor a sign of disrespect for Christianity or any other religion," Thompson said. He said the empty space demonstrates government neutrality toward religion.

Fast food lawsuit: For a second time this year, a federal judge threw out a lawsuit Thursday that alleged McDonald's misled consumers into believing its food was nutritious and part of a healthy diet.

U.S. District Court Judge Robert Sweet said the plaintiffs failed to allege adequately that McDonald's violated New York's consumer protection

laws and made no allegations that they witnessed any deceptive advertising on the part of the fast food chain.

The Manhattan judge noted in particular that the lawsuit, brought on behalf of two infant plaintiffs, failed to back allegations that any injuries suffered resulted from McDonald's representations about its French fries or hash browns.

In January, Sweet tossed out an earlier version of the lawsuit that claimed McDonald's food caused health problems in children.

In that ruling, he said, consumers "cannot blame McDonald's if they, nonetheless, choose to satiate their appetite with a surfeit of supersized McDonald's products."

"If a person knows or should know that eating copious orders of supersized McDonald's products is unhealthy and may result in weight gain ... it is not the place of the law to protect them from their own excesses," Sweet wrote at the time.

Missing children: Investigators failed to find the bodies of two missing New Hampshire children during two days of searching woods and muddy fields near two Ohio Turnpike interchanges, they said Wednesday. The children were believed killed and buried by their father.

Authorities believe the bodies of Sarah Gehring, 14, and her brother, Philip, 11, are buried somewhere along Interstate 80 in the Midwest. They were following up on tips.

Manuel Gehring, their father, is charged with murder in the case. He has pleaded innocent.

Ex-priest killing: A Massachusetts legislative committee will hold hearings on the prison killing of defrocked priest John J. Geoghan once the state Executive Office of Public Safety finishes its investigation.

Lawyers, Massachusetts Correctional Legal Services, and the prison guards' union have all criticized the makeup of the investigative panel, calling it an internal investigation. The panel includes: George Camp, a prison consultant; Mark Delaney, a state police major; and Mark Reilly, head of investigations for the state Department of Correction.

Professor pleads not guilty: One of the nation's top plague researchers, who earlier this year reported vials of the deadly bacteria stolen from his laboratory, pleaded innocent Wednesday to 54 federal counts of theft, embezzlement and fraud.

Texas Tech professor Thomas C. Butler was indicted in April on 15 charges stemming from allegations that he smuggled samples of plague bacteria from Tanzania, illegally transported them within the United States and abroad, and then lied about it to authorities.

War on terrorism

U.S.-Turkey talks: U.S. and Turkish military officials on Thursday discussed Turkish conditions for sending peacekeepers to Iraq, including a demand for a joint crackdown against Kurdish rebels in Iraq.

Turkey, NATO's only Muslim member, is considering a U.S. request to send between 5,000 and 10,000 troops to Iraq.

The Turkish demand would be difficult to meet. About 5,000 Turkish Kurdish rebels are based in northern Iraq and Turkey is pushing for U.S. backing in its fight against them. The rebels are experienced mountain fighters, hiding out in remote areas.

Missile plot: A bail hearing for a man facing terrorism charges in an alleged missile-smuggling plot was postponed Thursday so that prosecutors could present a witness to bolster accusations that the defense claimed were vague.

Meanwhile, defendant Hemant Lakhani will remain held without bail. The hearing was set to resume next Thursday.

Indonesian cleric verdict: Attorneys for a radical Muslim cleric convicted of sedition but cleared of heading a Southeast Asian terror group said Wednesday the verdict was politically motivated, while Indonesia's government defended the ruling as showing its commitment to fighting terror.

Abu Bakar Bashir was sentenced Tuesday to four years in prison for his involvement in a plot by the al-Qaida-linked group, Jemaah Islamiyah, to overthrow the Indonesian government and lesser charges of faking travel documents and entering Indonesia illegally.

Kenya terror fight: Kenyan authorities helped thwart a potential terrorist attack in the East African nation in recent months by stepping up anti-terrorism efforts, arresting suspects and raiding a house allegedly used by plotters, the U.S. ambassador to Kenya said Wednesday.

The Kenyan government has also improved security around the country's airports and places frequented by Westerners, said Ambassador Mark Bellamy during a visit to poverty-stricken northeastern Kenya.

World

Liberia peacekeeping mission: A team of West African peacekeepers was headed to a region north of the Liberian capital Thursday to investigate reports of possible fighting that has put tens of thousands of civilians on the run despite a peace deal.

The small assessment team left Monrovia by road for Totota, about 60 miles to the north, said Col. Theophilus Tawiah of Ghana, the peace mission's chief of staff.

The sound of gunfire and mortar explosions sparked an exodus from Totota and nearby Zensu on Tuesday, but the nature of the fighting — if any — is unclear.

Serbia torture accusations: Serbia's justice minister on Thursday denied allegations by human rights group Amnesty International that suspects arrested in connection with the assassination of Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic were tortured by prison guards.

"I say with full responsibility that there was no torture in Serbian prisons," Vladan Batic said.

Batic, however, did not rule out that some of the 4,500 suspects rounded up after Djindjic's murder on March 12 might have been beaten in police stations.

Death of French actress: A French rock star held in Lithuania on suspicion of manslaughter will stay in prison through Oct. 14, a Lithuanian judge ruled Thursday.

Bertrand Cantat, the lead singer of the popular rock band Noir Desir, has been held in Lithuania since late July after his girlfriend, actress Marie Trintignant, was beaten into a coma. She later died.

Cantat, who was not in court, is reportedly in a depressed state about the death of Trintignant and has lost 22 pounds, his lawyer, Virginijus Leonas Papirtis, said.

Nuclear test ban treaty: Diplomats sought to add momentum Wednesday to efforts to enact a nuclear test ban treaty, appealing to the United States and several other countries to ratify the measure quickly and advance the cause of world peace.

The Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty is considered a critical element in stopping the spread of nuclear weapons, since a ban on testing would make developing such arms almost impossible.

WWII chemical weapons: China's defense minister urged his Japanese counterpart on Wednesday to ensure potentially lethal chemical weapons abandoned during World War II are cleaned up, but emphasized that overall relations between the two countries are "going well."

China hopes Japan will "pay high attention" to the chemical weapons issue and take "appropriate measures to solve it as soon as possible," Cao Gangchuan told visiting Japanese defense chief Shigeru Ishiba.

"The chemical weapons left behind by Japanese invaders still pose a serious threat to Chinese people's safety and living environment," Cao was quoted saying by China's official Xinhua News Agency.

Russian sub charges: The captain of the vessel that was towing a decommissioned Russian nuclear submarine when it sank in the Barents Sea last week has been charged with violating the rules of marine navigation, Russia's chief military prosecutor said Wednesday.

"I am convinced that the commander of the tow boat must be held responsible for the information that he gives and the resulting actions," Prosecutor Alexander Savenkov told a news conference. He said Capt. Sergei Zhemchuzhnov has been charged with breaking navigation rules.

The submarine K-159 sank Saturday during a storm while being towed to a port on the Kola Peninsula, where its reactor was to be removed and dismantled and the rest of the ship scrapped. Nine of the 10 men aboard were killed.

Business

WorldCom charges: Former WorldCom chief executive Bernie Ebbers is free on \$50,000 bail as his attorneys and prosecutors debate the legal merit of charges that he violated Oklahoma securities laws.

Ebbers, 62, pleaded innocent to the first charges brought against the man who presided during the telephone company's \$11 billion accounting scandal. A pretrial conference was set for Oct. 30.

Ebbers had no comment Wednesday after leaving an Oklahoma County courthouse, but his attorney, Reid Weingarten, said the charges against his client were "wildly insufficient."

Enron transcripts: The Houston Chronicle on Tuesday asked the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals to order a federal judge to unseal transcripts of three private pretrial conferences in the case of former Enron Corp. finance chief Andrew Fastow.

U.S. District Judge Kenneth Hoyt last week denied the Chronicle's request to unseal the transcripts. The Houston judge said he would continue to hold private chamber conferences with attorneys in the Enron cases if he deems "shop talk" about potential trial preparations and dates irrelevant "to the public's digestion."

Military

Fate of Roosevelt Roads: Puerto Rico's delegate to Congress met Wednesday with Pentagon officials to talk about possible future uses for the Navy's Roosevelt Roads base in the event the installation is closed.

Officials declined to give further details about the discussion between Anibal Acevedo Vila and acting Navy Secretary Hansford T. Johnson and members of his staff.

The base has not officially been designated for closing, but a directive to auction off the land has been included in the House's proposed defense appropriations bill for the next budget year, defense officials said.

From wire reports

News from around the war

Soldier dies in rollover in Iraq

TUCSON, Ariz. — A 28-year-old soldier from Tucson was killed when his military vehicle rolled over in Iraq, the Department of Defense announced Wednesday.

Sgt. Sean K. Cataudella died Sunday in Ba'qubah, Iraq, when a vehicle he was driving hit an embankment and rolled into a canal, the Pentagon said.

Cataudella was an eight-year Army veteran, said his mother, Connie Cataudella. He was assigned to the 1st Squadron, 10th Cavalry Regiment of the 4th Infantry Division at Fort Hood, Texas.

Cataudella, who had been in Iraq since the end of March as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom, didn't have a chance to see his youngest child, Kai, born six weeks ago, his mother said.

Other survivors include his wife, Naomi, children Alex, 7, and Damon, 3.

GI gets 7 years for Humvee crash

BALTIMORE — An Army sergeant who was accused of driving recklessly in a Humvee in Iraq when it flipped and crushed a soldier was found guilty of involuntary manslaughter and sentenced to seven years in prison, a military spokeswoman said Wednesday.

Sgt. Oscar Nelson III, 25, was accused of driving erratically and at excessive speed when the vehicle rolled over and killed Spc. Nathaniel Caldwell Jr. in the early hours of May 21.

A military judge found Nelson guilty of involuntary manslaughter, making a false official statement and obstruction of justice, Army spokeswoman Maj. Josselyn Aberle said in an e-mailed statement from Iraq. He could have received life in prison on a charge of unpremeditated murder during the general court-martial in Tikrit that ended Monday.

The conviction was appealed automatically, and Nelson will be dishonorably discharged, Aberle said in the statement.

Nelson and Caldwell, 27, served with the 404th Aviation Support Battalion of the 4th Infantry Division. Nelson repaired generators, and Caldwell was a tank mechanic and an aspiring minister from Arizona.

Soldiers return to Fort Hood

FORT HOOD, Texas — Almost 300 soldiers have returned to this Army post after serving in the Iraqi war, just as a like-sized number of troops from the 1st Cavalry Division were scheduled to depart the installation.

Most soldiers returning on Wednesday represented the 4th Infantry Division and 13th Corps Support Command. They were back for administrative reasons, such as preparation for new assignments and attendance at Army schools. A number were also sent back to Fort Hood to be discharged upon completion of their service.

Two "company-sized" groups from the 1st Cavalry Division were poised to depart on Thursday, an Army official said.

Master Sgt. Dave Larsen, a 1st Cavalry spokesman, said Wednesday that about 270 soldiers from infantry and military intelligence units within the division were set to deploy. He would not specify where the troops were being sent, only that they were leaving for the "Central Command area of operations."

That area includes both Iraq and Afghanistan.

Currently deployed from Fort Hood are about 20,000 of the 42,000 soldiers stationed at the post, said Dan Hassett, an Army spokesman.

FBI: Al-Qaida remains top danger

WASHINGTON — The al-Qaida presence in the United States is small and mainly involved in support for possible future attacks, but the terror network remains the most severe threat to Americans, the FBI's top counterterrorism official said Thursday.

The FBI has not detected any individuals or cells that appear to be actively planning attacks like those almost two years ago that killed about 3,000 people in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania.

Instead, most of the al-Qaida operatives in the United States are here to provide logistical support such as travel documents, recruitment and fund-raising, said Larry Mefford, who heads FBI counterterrorism and counterintelligence.

"My view is, it's very small but it does exist," Mefford said of the al-Qaida presence. "We do have evidence of it."

Mefford told reporters that the FBI's strategy for such people is to keep them under surveillance for as long as possible to uncover their al-Qaida contacts in the United States and overseas.

At the same time, criminal violations they commit are carefully tracked so that the individuals can be arrested at a moment's notice to disrupt or prevent terrorist operations from going forward.

"That's a judgment call that we will make tactically," Mefford said.

Mefford cautioned that the FBI may not have identified all of the al-Qaida operatives in the United States, and someone unknown could be plotting destruction similar to the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

"They do have the ability to change and adapt to their environment," he said. "Al-Qaida remains our No. 1 concern."

Another grave concern is the lone individual sympathetic to Muslim extremists who decides to conduct a deadly operation on his own.

"It's very difficult to stop these types of attacks," Mefford said.

FBI finds similarities in bombings

WASHINGTON — The FBI has identified similarities between two of the three recent bombings in Iraq but is not yet able to pinpoint whether the attacks were perpetrated by the same people, officials said Thursday.

FBI chemical tests found similar munitions were used in the Aug. 7 bombing of the Jordanian Embassy in Baghdad and the attack on the United Nations headquarters there 12 days later, said John Pistole, a senior FBI counterterrorism official.

Results from tests on last Friday's bombing of the Imam Ali shrine in Najaf should be available in a few days, Pistole added.

Pistole and Larry Mefford, the FBI's top counterterrorism official, told reporters the explosives used in the two similar bombings could be widely available in Iraq. Presence of similar munitions do not necessarily prove the bombings are linked to the al-Qaida terrorist network, loyalists to the Saddam Hussein regime or other some other group.

"It's too early to tell. I don't think we know enough yet," Mefford said.

Nineteen people died in the embassy bombing and 23 at U.N. headquarters. The Najaf mosque bombing killed up to 125, including leading Shiite cleric Ayatollah Mohammed Baqir al-Hakim.

KBR worker shot, killed in Iraq

HOUSTON — A civilian affiliated with oilfield services giant Halliburton was shot and killed Wednesday in Iraq.

Halliburton spokeswoman Wendy Hall said the victim worked for subsidiary Kellogg Brown & Root.

Hall declined to release the name of the victim, citing security reasons.

"The employee was fatally shot this morning in Baghdad," Hall said. "Our employee was driving a vehicle that was escorted by military personnel. The employee was evacuated to a nearby combat support hospital, where he was pronounced dead on arrival."

The employee was assigned to the KBR's project team supporting the Army's mail delivery, Hall said.

Another KBR employee who was part of the convoy was not injured, Hall said.

An investigation into the shooting was under way Wednesday, Hall said.

Judge: Witness may back Moussaoui

ALEXANDRIA, Va. — An al-Qaida captive is likely to testify that Zacarias Moussaoui was not contacted by the network to participate in the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, supporting the accused terrorist's claim that he was not part of the plot, a federal judge said.

By testifying that Moussaoui was not even contacted about the plot, the witness would go even further than the defendant's oft-stated contention that he never had a role in the attacks.

U.S. District Judge Leonie Brinkema cited the likely testimony to justify giving Moussaoui access to the prisoner for pretrial testimony and possibly as a trial witness. She also granted access to a second al-Qaida prisoner who would support Moussaoui's contention he was not part of the attack conspiracy.

The government has contended national security would be irreparably damaged and has defied Brinkema's order to produce a witness, former al-Qaida operative Ramzi Binalshibh.

Brinkema is expected to impose penalties against the government for its defiance, a move that could lead to intervention by a federal appeals court.

Court orders harsher sentences

RICHMOND, Va. — Jail terms for two Somali men who worked for a business linked to the al-Qaida terrorist network were too light, a federal appeals court ruled Wednesday.

The court ordered new sentencing for the men on counts of illegally structuring bank deposits totaling \$7.5 million at the Alexandria, Va., branch of the al-Barakat money transfer network.

Abdirahman Sheikh-Ali Isse was sentenced last

year to 18 months in prison. Abdillahi Abdi, who worked for him, was sentenced to 10 months.

Federal prosecutors had argued that the men should receive sentences of three to five years based on the size of the deposits.

The three-judge panel of the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals sent the case back to U.S. District Judge James C. Cacheris for the resentencing.

CIA believes WMD will be found

WASHINGTON — The head of the hunt for weapons of mass destruction in Iraq believes he will find the alleged weapons, said a congressman recently briefed on the effort.

Disarming Saddam Hussein was the Bush administration's top rationale for the war started in March, and officials said beforehand that they knew where weapons were hidden. But they have announced no weapons found in five months of searching.

Rep. Pete Hoekstra, R-Mich., told a Pentagon press conference Thursday that CIA weapons adviser David Kay is "doing all the leg work right now," looking for documentation, physical evidence and Iraqis who might have information about Saddam's alleged chemical, biological and nuclear weapons programs.

"He's believing he will find weapons of mass destruction," Hoekstra said when asked if he'd been briefed by Kay during a recent trip to Iraq. "He holds out the possibility that he may not — says it's a very, very remote possibility."

Kay, expected to report on search efforts this month, said in late July that "solid progress" was being made and that Iraqi scientists involved in the weapons programs were "collaborating and cooperating."

Inspectors seek return

UNITED NATIONS — U.N. weapons inspectors are ready to resume operations in Iraq despite the suicide bombing on U.N. headquarters in Baghdad that damaged their offices and killed two Iraqi staffers, according to a report to the U.N. Security Council.

The United States, however, has shown no sign of changing the position it adopted after the war of barring U.N. inspectors from returning to Iraq. Instead, it has deployed its own inspection teams.

The U.N. Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission, or UNMOVIC, made clear in its report to the Security Council Tuesday that U.N. inspectors have the expertise to verify any findings related to Iraq's weapons of mass destruction — and to conduct long-term monitoring of Iraq's weapons programs.

Ayatollah sends warning

BEIRUT, Lebanon — Lebanon's top Shiite Muslim cleric warned that Iraqi Shiites would join the armed resistance against U.S. and British forces if the occupation of Iraq persisted for too long.

Grand Ayatollah Sheikh Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah said Iraqi Shiite political leaders and clerics have been united in their rejection of the occupation and in their public calls for U.S. and British forces to leave the country.

"... When we examine the message of [Iraqi] Shiite leaders and clerics, we find that there is a single voice in rejecting the occupation and in calling on the occupation to leave Iraq to the Iraqis," Fadlallah said in a live interview with the Lebanese Future television station late Tuesday.

"[Joining the resistance] is not very far if the occupation continues to afflict the Iraqis, becoming a tool to restrict the Iraqis' freedom," he said.

German brewers make contribution

NORFOLK, Va. — The Germans didn't support the U.S. war effort in Iraq, but at least they're willing to buy American servicemembers a beer.

Munich-based Spaten, one of the world's oldest breweries, is donating 600 cases of lager to each branch of the U.S. military for personnel who fought in the war.

Navy Capt. Terry McKnight, commanding officer of the amphibious assault ship Kearsarge, said Wednesday that his sailors would have no qualms about drinking brew from a country that refused to join coalition forces in the invasion of Iraq.

"A cold beer is a cold beer," McKnight said.

However, there is one small problem that Louis Sieb, president of Spaten North America, did not consider when he came up with the idea. The average sailor is 20. Legal drinking age is 21.

"They give up everything, right? They put their lives on the line, right? And they can't drink beer? Still, a good thing, I think," Sieb said.

From wire reports

Report: Russia may send troops

MOSCOW — Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov said Thursday that Russia may send peacekeepers to Iraq as part of an international force, a strong signal that Moscow was edging closer to Washington in efforts to rebuild Iraq.

"It all depends on a specific resolution. I wouldn't exclude it outright," Ivanov said during Russian military maneuvers in the southern Astrakhan region, when asked whether Moscow can contribute peacekeepers to Iraq, the Interfax news agency reported.

Ivanov said Thursday that Russia's decision will hinge on discussions in the U.N. Security Council on a new U.S.-proposed draft resolution on giving the United Nations a greater role in Iraq.

U.K. to review Iraq troop levels

LONDON — Britain's defence secretary has ordered a review of British troop levels in Iraq after weeks of heightened insecurity, but Prime Minister Tony Blair said Thursday that there has been no decision to send additional forces.

The announcement that Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon had ordered a review of troop levels followed a published report Thursday that Foreign Secretary Jack Straw had proposed the deployment of 5,000 more British military personnel in Iraq.

"In the light of events in Iraq over past weeks, the defence secretary has asked for a review of the forces and resources required to support U.K. operations," the Defence Ministry said.

Britain has 11,000 troops in Iraq. Forty-nine British soldiers have died in the war, with 11 of them killed since May 1, when President Bush declared an end to major fighting.

Rumsfeld: Former Iraqi troops needed

BAGHDAD, Iraq — The United States wants to move more quickly to bring former Iraqi soldiers into the country's new security forces, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said Thursday.

Rumsfeld arrived in Baghdad on a visit to see for himself how the American-led occupation of Iraq is progressing. He planned to meet with U.S. military commanders and L. Paul Bremer, the American civil administrator here.

Rumsfeld said the top generals in Iraq don't want more than the 140,000 U.S. troops already on duty here. But they do want more Iraqis working as police, soldiers, security guards and border patrols, the defence secretary said.

The U.S. military is "looking at ways of accelerating" the process of bringing former members of Saddam Hussein's military — and possibly his security services — into the Iraqi security forces, Rumsfeld said.

The United States formally disbanded the Iraqi military and the intelligence and security services which had supported Saddam's dictatorship. Many who served in those organizations can serve in the new Iraqi forces, he said.

Iraqi enlisted soldiers and junior officers from lieutenant colonel on down could be eligible to join the new Iraqi army, Rumsfeld said, adding that all will be carefully screened to weed out those with anti-American leanings.

Health-care program still lacking

ARLINGTON, Va. — Under the former government, Iraqis received about 50 cents worth of health care. Today, it's much more than that.

Under direction of the U.S.-led Coalition Provisional Authority, the per capita amount for health care hovers around \$20; still not enough, but far greater than what they were accustomed to, a health official said.

The U.S. military role within the health ministry is comparatively small to the rest of operations.

The military has supplied a handful of physicians, workers occasionally will use field hospitals and surgeons treat people in outlying villages and areas, said Jim Haveman, the CPA's senior advisor to the Iraqi Ministry of Health, who has been working in Iraq since June.

Some of the ministry's \$210 million budget, funding for July through December, also will pay for the varying challenges facing the coalition.

to include repairing or rebuilding dilapidated hospitals and clinics, upgrading equipment, training emergency medical technicians, and teaching ill-trained physicians the newest in health-care procedures, said Haveman, the former head of the Michigan Health Department.

He anticipates the health ministry's budget for fiscal 2004 will range between \$600 million and \$800 million.

While "there are no epidemics" ailing Iraqis, their overall health is far worse than other countries in the region and citizens are in dire need of help, Haveman said.

For example, the infant mortality rate is 108 per 1,000 infants, far higher than the seven-to-1,000 affected in the United States.

"That's one of the highest in the world," he said. His staff has a goal of cutting that in half by 2005.

"There are challenges, but all the challenges are doable," he said.

From wire and staff reports

France, Germany fault U.S. plan for U.N. help in Iraq

BY GEIR MOULSON

The Associated Press

DRESDEN, Germany — The leaders of Germany and France criticized a U.S. draft resolution seeking international troops and money for Iraq, saying it falls short by not granting responsibility to Iraqis or a large enough role to the United Nations.

Secretary of State Colin Powell said the United States would welcome "constructive input" from the two countries on the resolution — but he insisted the draft put forward Wednesday already addresses France and Germany's concerns.

The U.S. proposed resolution seeks troops and financial support for Iraq's postwar reconstruction but declines to relinquish political or military control of the country.

German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder and French President Jacques Chirac insisted Washington had to go further.

The U.S. plan does not address the "priority objective" — the transfer of power to a homegrown Iraqi government, Chirac said.

Schroeder said the draft resolution had brought "movement" into the diplomacy. But he added: "I agree with the president when he says, 'not dynamic enough, not sufficient.'"

"Now is the time to look forward, and that can only happen if the United Nations can take responsibility for the political process," Schroeder said.

In Washington, Powell noted that the French and Germans had not put forward a timetable for transferring power to the Iraqis, and he underlined that the resolution calls on the Iraqis to help work out a timetable.

"I think the resolution is drafted in a way that deals with the concerns that leaders such as President Chirac and Chancellor Schroeder have raised in the past," he said. "We'd be more than happy to listen to their suggestions."

Schroeder and Chirac were both ardent opponents of the war in Iraq, and both are particularly adamant that the United States cede control of the political process there.

They said they hoped that the United States would be open to changes in the draft.

"We are naturally ready to study it in the most positive manner," Chirac said of the U.S. draft, adding that France would "present modification and amendments." He also said he believed any vote on the resolution was still some time away.

The draft resolution, obtained by The Associated Press, would transform the U.S.-led military force in Iraq into a U.N.-authorized multinational force under a unified command. Powell has since said an American would remain at the top of the unified command.

Key provisions in the U.S. draft would:

■ Call on U.N. member states to help train and equip an Iraqi police force.

■ Invite the U.S.-appointed Iraqi Governing Council to cooperate with the United Nations and U.S. officials in Baghdad to produce "a timetable and program for the drafting of a new constitution for Iraq and for the holding of democratic elections."

■ Ask the U.N. representative in Iraq to facilitate a "national dialogue and consensus building" to promote the political transition.

■ Ask all U.N. member states and international and regional organizations "to accelerate the provision of substantial financial contributions to support the Iraqi reconstruction effort" and appeal to international financial institutions to provide loans and other assistance.

■ Call on countries in the region "to prevent the transit of terrorists, arms for terrorists, and financing that would support terrorists."

The postwar operation is costing the United States about \$3.9 billion a month and has strained the American military, which has about 140,000 troops stationed in Iraq.

The resolution envisions a substantial infusion of international aid to defray costs now largely borne by U.S. taxpayers. At the same time, the administration is preparing a new budget request for \$60 billion to \$70 billion for reconstruction and the military operation of Iraq — nearly double what Congress was expecting, The Washington Post reported.

Edith M. Lederer of The Associated Press contributed to this report

Afghan, U.S. troops seek fleeing Taliban

BY NOOR KHAN

The Associated Press

QALAT, Afghanistan — Afghan and U.S. forces scoured gorges and rugged mountain peaks in southern Zabul for suspected Taliban fleeing fighting that left scores of insurgents dead, an Afghan commander said Thursday.

While Afghan officials claimed victory, the U.S. military said the battle in Zabul's Dai Chupan district was not over.

Separately, at least 24 Pakistani military helicopters swooped in low over the tribal regions that border Afghanistan in a renewed hunt for fleeing al-Qaida and Taliban, witnesses said Thursday.

Government officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said several of the helicopters carried "foreign" forces, an apparent reference to U.S. troops.

The U.S. military earlier deployed an unknown number of special forces into Pakistan's rugged tribal regions, but their whereabouts are kept secret and they keep a low profile, largely because of the deeply conservative nature of the region.

The Dai Chupan district in Afghanistan was the site of a nine-day offensive and some of the heaviest fighting since the ouster of the ruling Taliban in late 2001.

"The operation is ongoing, we are still searching for the enemy. We are not completed in Dai Chupan," U.S. military spokesman Maj. Ralf Marino said Thursday at Bagram Air Base, north of the Afghan capital, Kabul.

The main Afghan commander in the area, Haji Saifullah Khan, said the guerrilla fighters who escaped the battlefield have scattered in small groups to safe havens in neighboring provinces.

"It is not known so far whether Taliban leaders were among the dead," Khan said. "Many of the bodies were in bad shape."

Afghan troops have found the bodies of at least 124 rebels since the joint offensive by Afghan government and U.S.-led forces began early last week, Zabul Intelligence Chief Khalil Hotak said. Five Afghan government troops were killed in the fighting, he said.

Hotak's account could not be independently verified. U.S. officials have put the confirmed death toll among the insurgents at just 37, but they have not updated that figure since Monday.

Marino said Thursday that it was too early to give a death toll.

Khan said the U.S. forces laid siege to mountain caves in Larzab and Sairo Ghar mountains of Zabul province and Afghan soldiers moved in when the fighting ended.

The hostilities, triggered by a wave of Taliban attacks on Afghan officials, police and aid workers in the south and east of the country, have underscored the security problems faced by the administration of President Hamid Karzai that took power soon after the Taliban's ouster by U.S.-led forces in 2001.

While Kabul-based diplomats and Afghan officials say there is little threat to the government, the capacity of the Taliban to mass hundreds of fighters in one place has shown how precarious its control is over parts of the country.

There was no indication of who was being sought in the border area with neighboring Pakistan or whether fresh intelligence was available about fugitives in the area.

U.S. and Afghan officials repeatedly have said that fugitive al-Qaida and Taliban have taken refuge in Pakistan's tribal regions, where tribesmen have openly expressed a willingness to hide the fugitives.

Pakistan authorities also haven't dismissed the possibility that suspected terrorist mastermind Osama bin Laden might have taken refuge in the tribal regions.

Radical Islamic lawmakers who rule in northwest Pakistan demanded a halt to government sweeps there, saying they did not want U.S. forces in the tribal regions.

"This kind of operation has jeopardized the independence and sovereignty of our country," said Ikramullah Shahid, the deputy speaker of the legislature, which is ruled by an alliance of six religious parties.

"No country has the right to trample our geographic frontiers and carry out operations on our land," Shahid said to loud thumping of desks from his supporters.

Troops help rescue woman on Fuji

BY DAVID ALLEN
Stars and Stripes

Marines and sailors climbing Mount Fuji on Sunday found themselves involved in rescuing a Japanese woman from the cold mountainside.

The group of 80 assigned to the 3rd Marine Regiment, 3rd Marine Division, were about 45 minutes from the summit on a morning marked by fog and a cold wind when two Japanese men appeared carrying a woman in her mid-20s down the mountain trail, said Marine Sgt. Danny Patterson, of the 3rd Marine Expeditionary Force Consolidated Public Affairs Office.

One of the men spoke a little English, Patterson said. As a Navy corpsman examined the woman, the man explained they had spent a cold night on the mountain.

Petty Officer 3rd Class Gilbert R. Romain said the woman had a mild case of hypothermia that would worsen the longer she remained on the mountain.

Patterson said Romain told him: "We knew we had to act fast or within 30 minutes her symptoms could have changed to severe hypothermia."

Several of the Marines and Romain abandoned their hike and assisted the woman to a nearby first-aid station.

"We took off our jackets and wool caps and put them over her," Lance Cpl. Joseph F. Schnieder told Patterson. "We also gave her food and water. We gave her everything we could to help."

About that time, the rest of their company returned from the trail, abandoning the final push to the summit because of bad weather.

The Marines then decided to strap the woman into a stretcher they obtained at the first aid station and formed a human chain down a rocky stretch of the trail.

"Marines and sailors would continue to go to the front of the chain to keep the stretcher moving until they reached a service road," Patterson said. "Once they reached the road, which was still almost a 45-degree incline, three Marines ran for almost a mile-and-a-half to the bottom to get a vehicle to transport the woman."

"The park officials said they couldn't get a vehicle up to her, so they called in an ambulance to wait until the company got to the bottom with her."

It had taken more than three hours to reach the bottom and another hour wait for the ambulance, Patterson said.

While there, the sun came out and the woman slowly recovered, he said.

"Although the Marines didn't even get the woman's name, they were glad to help out," Patterson said.

E-mail David Allen at: allend@pstripes.osd.mil

Scandal holding up secretary nomination

BY ROBERT WELLER
The Associated Press

DENVER — Air Force Secretary James Roche's nomination as Army secretary is being held up because of the sexual assault scandal at the Air Force Academy, a senator's spokesman said Thursday.

The nomination will probably not be considered by the Senate until after an independent commission looking into the scandal issues its report Sept. 22, said Dick Wadhams, spokesman for Sen. Wayne Allard, R-Colo.

Allard has been a Roche supporter, Wadhams said, but does not object to the delay, which was first reported in the Colorado Springs Gazette.

"It's not far in the future," Wadhams said.

Tillie Fowler, a former Florida congresswoman, is heading the independent panel created by Congress to investigate reports of 146 sexual assaults. The academy's top commanders were replaced after being accused of punishing female cadets for reporting assaults.

Her committee is holding a public meeting Friday in Crystal City, Va.

"There won't be any witnesses. It is more an opportunity for them to openly discuss the information

they have gathered," committee spokesman Tom Alexander said.

He said the committee has given no hint of whether it will hold Roche or former commanders responsible for allowing a culture some say made the academy a haven for sexual predators.

A recent survey by the Defense Department's inspector general found that nearly one in five female cadets said they were sexually assaulted during their four years at the academy.

Last week, Lt. Gen. John A. Rosa, the new superintendent, publicly blamed his predecessors for ignoring obvious signs of the scandal, saying it was "unbelievable to me that nobody knew what was going on."

So far, only senior officer has been held responsible for the scandal: Lt. Gen. John Dillager, the superintendent before Rosa, who was demoted to major general upon his retirement Sept. 1.

Roche was nominated as Army secretary after Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld fired Thomas E. White in April. The Senate Armed Services Committee received the nomination July 7 but has not scheduled a hearing.

If the Senate rejects Roche, he presumably would remain Air Force secretary, Wadhams said.

Former Federal Aviation Administration official Barbara McConnell Barrett has been nominated as Roche's replacement at the Air Force.

Decorated retired Marine gen. dies

CONYERS, Ga. — Raymond G. Davis, a retired Marine general who was one of the nation's most highly decorated military officers, died Wednesday of a heart attack. He was 88.

Davis was awarded the Navy Cross and the Purple Heart in 1944.

He received the Medal of Honor from President Harry Truman, two Silver Star Medals, a Legion of Merit with Combat V and the Bronze Star Medal in Korea in 1950.

Fifteen years later, Davis was awarded a second Legion of Merit and then, in 1968, the Republic of Vietnam awarded him the Distinguished Service Medal and three personal decorations from the Vietnamese government.

Davis received the rank of general in 1971 and retired the next year from the Marine Corps after more than 33 years of active duty. He was then awarded a Gold Star in lieu of a second Distinguished Service Medal.

Earlier this year, Davis received the Korea Society Van Fleet Award in recognition of the work he had done on behalf of the Korean people.

Suit possible in Ramstein crash

KOBLENZ, Germany — A lawyer for survivors of a 1988 air show crash at Ramstein Air Base said he would consider suing the U.S. Defense Department after a German state court threw out a damages claim on Thursday.

Five survivors of the crash were seeking \$55,000 in damages for pain and suffering caused by the crash, aiming to clear the way for 70 others to follow suit. But the state court in Koblenz said the statute of limitations had run out.

The government also argued that 32 million marks, now worth \$17.7 million, in damages were paid out during the first decade after the disaster.

"We're very disappointed that the government position was based on the statute of limitations," said Gerhart Baum, a former German interior minister who represented the victims.

Baum said he would consider filing a suit in the United States, arguing that the U.S. military did not have sufficient security in place.

Seventy people were killed when three Italian air force stunt jets collided at Ramstein Air Base on Aug. 28, 1988, hurtling one of the planes into thousands of spectators below.

Judge rules janitor is a security risk

PHILADELPHIA — A judge revoked the security clearance of a janitor at Lockheed Martin because of a Defense Department policy that flags workers in financial trouble.

The janitor, Michael Lynch, had argued that nearly all his back taxes had been paid and he had an unblemished 19-year work record at Lockheed's Moorestown, N.J., plant.

Administrative Judge James A. Young ruled Aug. 26 that although Lynch had made progress, he admits that if another family emergency arose, he may let those bills lapse again.

Lynch has 15 days to appeal. Lockheed Martin has promised Lynch a job even if he lost the clearance.

Defense Department policy states that people in financial trouble may be tempted to sell military secrets to escape debt. The department asked the judge to revoke Lynch's clearance after finding out he had a 1993 bankruptcy and an unpaid city tax bill.

GI returns home just after daughter's first steps

BY SARAH KELLEY
The Northern Virginia Journal

ALEXANDRIA, Va. — Jermaine Ford knew when he joined the Army Reserve there was a chance he someday would have to leave home and fight for his country.

But Ford never anticipated being called to serve overseas just weeks after his daughter, Samiyah, was born.

"I was nervous, but the hardest part was leaving her," said 25-year-old Ford, who returned home to Fairfax County in late August after a 10-month tour in Iraq.

Ford entered the Army Reserve in 2000 to help pay for college. His daughter was born in July 2002; less than two months later Ford received word he would be shipped out to Iraq. Ford was only a few credits away from obtaining a degree in management information systems at Northern Virginia Community College when the phone call came.

"They told us in July we only had a 10-percent chance of going to Iraq," he said. "That's why I was so surprised when they told me to pack my bags and get ready to go."

Ford, who is raising his daughter with the help of his mother and father, Phyllis and Jarod Ford, said goodbye in November to his family and boarded a plane with other reservists from the Fort Belvoir 299th Engineering Company. The group landed in the desert just north of Baghdad. To Ford's dismay, the weather was bitter and cold — the first of many surprises he encountered during his stint in Iraq.

"The weather was one of the hardest parts. It was freezing cold at first and then got unbearably hot and mosquitoes were biting you every minute," he said.

Then came the fighting when war was waged March 20. Ford worked as a mechanic and was never engaged in combat, but there were times when bombs exploded just a few feet from his camp. Because the sergeant frequently changed locations, he rarely had a chance to correspond with his family.

"I was a nervous wreck. All I could think about was maybe he would get hurt or even die," his mother said. "When the fighting started, that was the worst part. We didn't know what was going on or where he was."

While life in the desert was difficult, Ford said there were times when he enjoyed his stay in Iraq. Iraqi children often would follow American soldiers around and try to talk to them using the few English words they knew, Ford said.

"Meeting the Iraqi people was the best part," he said. "People see a small group of Iraqis do something bad and they blame it on the whole country, but they really were nice people."

The people Ford met live in appalling poverty, he said.

When Ford first was called to serve, he said he wasn't sure why American troops were intervening in Iraq, he was just following orders.

"After seeing those people and how they suffer, I felt like there was a reason we were over there," he said.

Ford was proud to serve, but after 10 months he was ready to return home to his family.

He looked forward to a home-cooked meal and seeing green trees and grass. But most of all he wanted to kiss his daughter, who took her first step and spoke her first words while he was away. Ford said he was afraid Samiyah wouldn't remember him when he returned.

"I was quite surprised when I saw her. She had grown so much," he said. "As soon as she saw me she smiled right away and I knew she remembered me."

NFL concert pays tribute to military

WASHINGTON — Twenty-five thousand military troops will be front and center at Thursday night's star-studded concert on the National Mall to kick off the NFL season.

The NFL originally approached the Pentagon to ask that 2,000 service men and women be present for the concert, featuring Aerosmith, Britney Spears, Good Charlotte, Mary J. Blige and Aretha Franklin. The Pentagon responded by promising many times that number, said NFL spokesman Brian McCarthy.

Besides saluting the start of the professional football season, the concert will be part of Operation Tribute to Freedom, a military effort to "help Americans express their support for the troops who are coming home from Iraq and Afghanistan," said Col. Dan Wolfe.

The program is also designed to create a strong bond between the military and citizens and underscore the message that the war on terrorism is constantly being fought, he said.

Pentagon OKs digital taps

WASHINGTON — Chronically short of musicians for military funerals, the Pentagon has approved the use of a push-button bugle that plays taps by itself as the operator holds it to his lips.

Only about 500 buglers are on active duty on any one day, but about 1,800 people with military service die across the country each day and are eligible for honors ceremonies, Air Force Lt. Col. Cynthia Collin, a Pentagon spokeswoman, said Thursday.

So the Defense Department worked with private industry to invent the "ceremonial bugle," which has a small digital recording device inserted into its bell to play the music.

From wire reports

Man executed for abortion doctor slaying

BY RON WORD

The Associated Press

STARKE, Fla. — Still defiant even as he was strapped to a gurney, a former minister who said he murdered an abortion doctor and his bodyguard to save the lives of unborn babies was executed Wednesday by injection. He was the first person put to death in the United States for anti-abortion violence.

Paul Hill, 49, was condemned for the July 29, 1994, shooting deaths of Dr. John Bayard Britton and his bodyguard, retired Air Force Lt. Col. James Herman Barrett, and the wounding of

Barrett's wife outside the Ladies Center in Pensacola.

As he has since the slaying, Hill showed no remorse and urged abortion foes to use whatever means to protect the unborn.

"If you believe abortion is a lethal force, you should oppose the force and do what you have to do to stop it," Hill said as he lay strapped to the gurney in the execution chamber. "May God help you to protect the unborn as you would want to be protected."

Hill was pronounced dead at 6:08 p.m., Gov. Jeb Bush's office said.

Death penalty opponents and others had urged Bush to halt the execution, some of them warning Hill's death

would make him a martyr and unleash more violence against abortion clinics. The governor said he would not be "bullied" into stopping the execution.

Florida abortion clinics and police were on heightened alert for reprisals.

Outside Florida State Prison, extra law enforcement officers, explosives-sniffing dogs and undercover officers were in place to prevent protests from getting out of hand. About 50 abortion and death penalty foes quickly left following the execution as rain fell and lightning struck near the prison.

Hill, a former Presbyterian minister, had final visits with family members and his religious adviser stayed with him until just before the execution.

Since losing his automatic appeals, Hill has not fought his execution and insisted up to the day before his death that he would be forgiven by God for killing to save the unborn.

"I expect a great reward in heaven," he said in an interview Tuesday, during which he was cheerful, often smiling. "I am looking forward to glory."

Fringe elements of the anti-abortion movement that condone clinic violence have invited attacks on Web sites that proclaim Hill as a martyr. Members of the mainstream anti-abortion movement have denounced the calls for violence.

Hill was the 57th inmate executed since Florida resumed executions in 1979 and the third in Florida this year.

Firm to cut the price of its CDs

LOS ANGELES — Universal Music Group, whose roster of artists includes 50 Cent, U2, Elton John and Diana Krall, will cut the price of its wholesale CDs and push for a \$12.98 retail cap on its discs in an attempt to woo music fans back into record stores.

The world's largest recording company hopes retailers, who have suffered as industrywide music sales dropped 31 percent the last three years, will follow its lead and pass on the savings to consumers.

Universal hopes the actual retail price of most of its CDs will end up about \$10 or less, comparable to the \$9.99 retail price that music fans enjoyed in the early 1990s, at the height of a price war between the recording companies.

It was not immediately clear how retailers would respond to the move.

Universal's current wholesale price for a CD album is \$12.02, with a manufacturer suggested retail price of \$18.98. Under the new pricing structure, the wholesale price would be \$9.09.

The price changes would go into effect by Oct. 1.

Identity theft up

WASHINGTON — Identity theft cost consumers and businesses \$53 billion last year, the Federal Trade Commission says in the most comprehensive government study of the increasing problem.

A survey in March and April, of 4,057 randomly selected adults, suggests that 27.3 million people were victimized during the past five years when someone made unauthorized charges on their credit cards, took money from their bank accounts, or obtained a credit card or official document in their name.

Last year, based on the survey, 9.9 million Americans were victims of identity theft, costing them \$5 billion and businesses and financial institutions \$48 billion.

The FTC has set up a Web site with tips on how to avoid identity theft, www.consumer.gov/idtheft, and urges consumers to carefully review their credit card statements each month, destroy charge slips rather than simply throw them in the trash, and check their accounts annually with the three credit reporting bureaus.

"The best thing to do is be careful about who you give your credit card to," Howard Beales, the FTC's consumer protection director, said Wednesday. "Keep up with your receipts."

Poll finds teen drug use up slightly

WASHINGTON — Illegal drug use and cigarette smoking among sixth- through 12th-graders increased slightly during the last school year compared with the year before, says a survey released Wednesday. Alcohol use remained at the same level during both years.

Nearly one-fourth, or 24 percent, of these teenagers reported using illegal drugs — marijuana, cocaine, heroin, hallucinogens and others — at least once in the 2002-03 school year, compared with 22 percent the year before, according to the private study by Pride Surveys.

A 1998 federal law established the survey as a measure of the effectiveness of White House drug control policy.

The survey found cigarette use increased slightly to 27 percent in the 2002-03 school year from 26 percent the year before. About half of the students reported drinking alcohol in each year.

While the overall increases were not dramatic, the survey's author, Thomas J. Gleaton, said an important question is how much teen drug use the nation is willing to accept.

"If one in four teens using drugs is acceptable, we

have done well in controlling drugs over the past decade," Gleaton said at a news conference. "If a quarter of our students using drugs is unacceptable, then we simply must do more."

Spelling counts

NEW YORK — Federal agents Wednesday arrested a man they say runs Web sites that exploit misspellings by computer users to direct children looking for Disneyland or the Teletubbies to explicit sex instead.

Officials said it was the first prosecution in the nation under a provision of the new Amber Alert legislation that makes it a crime to use a misleading Web address to draw children to pornography. The provision calls for a prison sentence of up to four years.

John Zuccarini, 53, was arrested at a motel in Hollywood, Fla., where authorities believe he had been living for months.

Judge won't allow alleged abuse tape

MILWAUKEE — A judge said an audio tape of a school bus driver allegedly threatening and slapping a boy with Down syndrome cannot be used as evidence during the driver's trial.

Milwaukee County Circuit Judge Michael Brennan granted a defense motion to bar the tape from being used as evidence against Brian Duchow, who has pleaded innocent to charges of child abuse and disorderly conduct.

The judge did allow Duchow's alleged confession, which police say resulted from the tape. The driver admitted slapping Jacob Mutolo, 9, in anger and hitting him in the leg, according to the criminal complaint.

The boy's parents put a tape recorder in their son's backpack because they wanted to know more about reports he was misbehaving on the bus.

Report: Assistant DA mugged

NEW YORK — A Brooklyn assistant district attorney who works in a unit that handles street crimes was mugged at a subway station on her way to work, according to a published report.

Sara Littman, 28, was robbed at knifepoint by a man who shoved her against a wall, demanded her wallet and pushed her down a flight of stairs, The Daily News reported Thursday.

"She was very afraid. The attacker was very strong," Jerry Schmetterer, a spokesman for the district attorney's office, told the News. "It kept flashing in her mind that she had handled tons of cases like this, now she was a victim herself."

The Monday attack took place at about 4 p.m. as Littman walked up the stairs of the subway station for the N, R, W and M lines at Lawrence Street in downtown Brooklyn, the News said.

The News said Littman has worked in District Attorney Charles Hynes' office for three years and is part of its "red zone squad," which deals with such crimes as muggings and subway attacks.

CDC releases smoking report

ATLANTA — About 8.6 million Americans have chronic illnesses related to smoking, according to the government's first national estimate.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported Thursday that about 10 percent of current and former smokers have chronic smoking-related diseases. The figures come from a national telephone survey in 2000.

Half of the ill current smokers said they had chronic bronchitis and a quarter said they had emphysema. Only 1 percent said they had lung cancer.

Among former smokers, about a quarter of those who were ill said they had chronic bronchitis or emphysema or had had a heart attack.

Previously, the CDC had estimates only of smoking-related deaths each year in the United States — 440,000.

Too little for Taco Bell

CADD VALLEY, Ark. — A man's skimpy swimsuit was too much — or too little — for Taco Bell workers.

Employees at Taco Bell called police Sunday when the man walked into the restaurant wearing only a tiny black Speedo swimsuit and a cut-off T-shirt during the Labor Day weekend.

Caddo Valley Police Chief Hiram Latin said his attire, or lack thereof, was a little too revealing.

"He was inappropriately dressed for a restaurant," said Latin.

He said the man had left his clothes at a lake. The man faces a \$750 fine and possible jail time if convicted of indecent exposure.

According to Arkansas law, a person can be charged with indecent exposure if "he knows his conduct is likely to cause affront or alarm."

Police ticketed the man and took photos of him in the Speedo, for use in court.

Man falls from roof for rescue

EDGEWATER, Fla. — A 91-year-old man grew weak while cleaning his roof last weekend and lay there for two days before purposely rolling off, falling 8 feet into his back yard where he was rescued.

The man, whose name was not released, cried for help while in his yard for several hours Monday until a neighbor heard him and called 911, said Mark O'Keefe, spokesman for EVAC ambulance service.

Paramedics treated the man for dehydration, exposure, including a sunburn and bug bites, and minor scrapes and bruises, O'Keefe said. He was taken to Bert Fish Medical Center in New Smyrna Beach and released later Monday.

The man told paramedics he climbed onto the roof — as he does every Saturday — to clean it off, but this time he experienced an episode of weakness and could not get back to the ladder to come down, O'Keefe said.

He called for help for two days, but no one heard him.

The man told paramedics he rolled off the roof as a last resort, hoping someone would see or hear him from the ground, O'Keefe said.

Mayor finds employees slacking off

CRANSTON, R.I. — Private investigators hired by Mayor Stephen Laffey found public employees showing up late, leaving early, sleeping on the job and eating fast-food restaurants rather than working.

Since April, the city has spent \$15,000 on private investigators who videotaped and followed city employees.

Hearings will be held Monday to decide on possible disciplinary action.

Flag desecration law challenged

SOUTH BEND, Ind. — A federal judge dismissed a lawsuit challenging Indiana's flag desecration law brought by a Goshen high school student.

U.S. District Court Judge Allen Sharp ruled that Megan Lawson had no case because prosecutors never threatened to charge her.

Lawson carried an American flag painted with a peace sign during an anti-war rally in March.

From wire reports

Juanes sweeps Latin Grammys

By ADRIAN SAINZ

The Associated Press

MIAMI — Three years ago, Juanes was a relative unknown and wondering whether his decision to move to Los Angeles and start a solo career was a good idea.

On Wednesday, the Colombian singer-songwriter was showered with five Latin Grammys, including album of the year for "Un Dia Normal" (A Normal Day) and record and song of the year for "Es Por Ti" (It's For You).

"I never thought that this was going to happen to me," said Juanes, whose album spent a record 65 weeks on the Billboard Latin charts. "Three years ago, I was lost completely in Los Angeles."

Juanes had already won four Latin Grammys prior to Wednesday's ceremony and won all of the awards he was nominated for. He also won best rock solo album and best rock song for "Mala Gente."

Juanes, wearing a black T-shirt that read, "Se Habla Espanol," said he hoped his win would help people look at his homeland in a new light.

"I know a lot of times, people have a bad image of my country," he said. "That's why it's so important for me to be here, to represent the other side of Colombia."

After the ceremony, backstage, he said: "This is the most impressive day in my life."

While Juanes was the evening's big winner, the show's most rousing moment came at the start of the show. Celia Cruz, who just a year ago kicked off the Latin Grammys with an electrifying performance, was given a posthumous tribute with a medley of her some of her biggest hits.

"Azucar!" — Cruz's trademark rallying cry — was the final shout of the tribute, performed by Marc Anthony, Gloria Estefan, India and others. The Queen of Salsa died of a brain tumor in July.

Cruz's husband, trumpeter Pedro Knight, was watching from the audience. Veteran Venezuelan salsa singer Oscar D'Leon showed fans he has recovered from the multiple heart attacks he suffered earlier this year by singing on the tribute.

The ceremony included energetic performances from Thalia, Bacilos and Molotov, but also incorporated non-Latin artists: Juanes performed with the hip-hop group the Black Eyed Peas, while Brazilian singer Alexandre Pires sang with "American Idol" winner Kelly Clarkson.

Orishas won for best hip-hop album, and another Cuban act, Ibrahim Ferrer — best known as a member of Buena Vista Social Club — won for best traditional tropical album.

Twelve Cuban acts — including pianist Chucho Valdes and the popular group Los Van Van — had been nominated for the awards. None was granted a visa in time to attend.

A pregnant Olga Tanon screamed on stage when she won best pop vocal album by a female for "Sobrevivir." It was her second Latin Grammy.

"My English is very bad, for this reason I have to talk in Spanish," she said apologetically before giving her acceptance speech in Spanish.

Backstage, Tanon said: "I swear I was surprised. Anything could have happened. The competition was very strong but I always have faith. I'm super happy."

Gustavo Santaolalla, who produced Juanes' record breaking album, won three times; two awards for record and album of the year and another award for arranging and producing "Bajofondo Tango Club," the best pop instrumental album.

Other winners included Spanish singer David Bisbal for best new artist; composer-arranger Paquito D'Rivera for classical and Latin jazz albums; and Mexican Joan Sebastian for regional Mexican song and banda album.

Bebu Silvetti, the early disco pioneer who worked in various genres, was honored posthumously as producer of the year. Silvetti, 59, died in July of complications from pneumonia. Veteran musician Willie Colon accepted the award for Silvetti.

Abbas gives ultimatum

By LARA SUKHTIAN

The Associated Press

RAMALLAH, West Bank — Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas asked parliament to either support him or strip him of his post Thursday, saying infighting is keeping him from making progress on a U.S.-backed peace plan.

Weakened by a power struggle with Yasser Arafat, Abbas said he must be given full power to carry out reforms if the peace plan is to succeed — a demand which, if met, would also strengthen his hand against the militants he is pressing to stop attacks against Israelis.

Abbas — who has said it was a mistake for the Palestinians to use deadly violence in the past three years against Israel — stopped short of seeking a vote of confidence but said he is leaving his future in the hands of parliament.

"I am not attached to this post and I am not [making] and will not make any effort to keep this post. It is a difficult mission that many describe as impossible," Abbas told legislators.

Parliament scheduled a closed-door session for Saturday to meet with Abbas again and discuss his demands, after which legislators were to decide whether to hold a confidence vote next week.

Abbas' appeal is the latest chapter in a power struggle that began as soon as Arafat appointed him, under international pressure, in April. The two wrangled over Cabinet appointments, especially when Arafat unsuccessfully opposed Abbas' choice for security chief, Mohammad Dahlan.

Arafat, who is accused by Israel of fomenting terrorism, remains more popular.

Abbas has minimal support among Palestinians, many of whom say they distrust him because he has Israeli and U.S. backing. But there appears to be a widespread understanding that his ouster could deal a heavy blow to efforts toward Palestinian statehood.

In his speech, Abbas only hinted at his conflict with Arafat, saying there were "problems" between his government and the Palestinian leadership.

Abbas is demanding Arafat relinquish control over several security agencies that he still commands. While Abbas has not spelled this out, if he fully controlled the armed services he would have a stronger hand against the militants. Arafat has balked at giving up one of his last concrete sources of power.

Abbas told parliament that "without a legitimate force in the hands of one authority ... we will not advance one step on the political track," a reference to the U.S.-backed "road map" plan which foresees Palestinian statehood by 2005.

The United States and Israel demand that the Palestinians dismantle the violent groups, as required by the plan. Abbas has expressed willingness to persuade them to disarm, but told parliament he would not order a clampdown.

"This government does not deal with the opposition groups with a policing mentality, but with a mentality of dialogue," he said.

Abbas portrayed a unilateral cease-fire, declared by the armed groups June 29, as the main achievement of his first 100 days in office. He accused Israel of having sabotaged the truce with deadly arrest raids, and for evading its obligations under the peace plan. Israel said the militants had been using the lull to regroup.

Militants carried out reprisal bombings for the Israeli raids, including one on Aug. 19 in which 21 people were killed on a Jerusalem bus. Israel, in response, killed a senior Hamas leader in a missile strike, prompting Hamas and Islamic Jihad to formally call off the truce.

He said the United States did not do enough to stop what he called "Israeli provocations" during a period of relative calm.

Blair tells Iran to allow nuke inspections

The Associated Press

LONDON — Prime Minister Tony Blair on Thursday urged Iran to comply with international demands regarding nuclear power and to cease support for terrorist groups.

He said Britain would remain critical of Tehran until it agreed to allow tougher inspections of its nuclear sites, and said his government was under "no illusions" about its relationship with the Iranian authorities.

"We have a policy of, I would describe it actually, as critical engagement," Blair told a news conference. "We are engaged with Iran, we have a

dialogue with their leadership, but we are under no illusions.

"It is important both that they adhere completely to the demands of the international community in respect of nuclear weapons and that they cease all support of terrorist groups," he said. "Until those two things are done, that engagement is going to remain critical."

Iran said Monday it will not allow unfettered inspections of its nuclear facilities until the U.N. atomic agency recognizes its right to acquire nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.

The United States accuses Iran of developing a clandestine nuclear weapons program in violation of the Nuclear

Nonproliferation Treaty. Iran insists its nuclear programs are for generating electricity — a right that it says is guaranteed under the treaty.

Washington also says that Iran supports terrorism.

Relations between Britain and Iran have soured in recent weeks over last month's arrest of a former Iranian diplomat in England in connection with the 1994 bombing of a Jewish center in Argentina.

The British embassy in Tehran closed Wednesday after five shots were fired at the building. No one was injured in the incident, which came two days after a rowdy protest outside the embassy over Britain's role in the occupation of Iraq.

Several missing in copter crash in Russia

ROSTOV-ON-DON, Russia — A helicopter with up to nine people on board crashed in southern Russia on Thursday, and its burnt-out wreck left little hope that anyone survived, officials said.

The Ka-32 helicopter — which its owners said was delivering supplies to a construction site in the mountains — was flying near the Black Sea resort city of Sochi when it went missing in the mountains in deep fog, said Alexander Lemeshev, a spokesman for the Emergency Situations Ministry's branch in southern Russia.

Construction workers found the burned and destroyed helicopter near a mountain about 35 miles north of Sochi, said Rudolf Teimurazov, deputy head of the Interstate Aviation Committee in Moscow.

Preliminary reports from rescuers who reached the site indicated there were no survivors, Teimurazov said.

Lemeshev said that the helicopter only carried the crew of four, but Nikolai Shustov, the chief of the ministry's office in Sochi, said it had nine people on board, including five passengers.

Ground controllers lost communication with the crew after hearing a bang. Mountaineers in the area told emergency officials in Sochi that they had seen a helicopter flying low over the mountains and then heard an explosion and saw smoke.

The crash, which came just as Russian President Vladimir Putin arrived in Sochi, closely follows two recent helicopter crashes that killed a total of 26 people last month in Russia's Far East.

The Aug. 20 crash of an Mi-8 helicopter killed all 20 people on board, including a regional governor, after the crew dangerously deviated from the set course and slammed into the ground in low, thick clouds.

Cuban human rights violations condemned

STRASBOURG, France — The European Parliament on Thursday condemned human rights violations in Cuba and urged President Fidel Castro to release political prisoners.

European Union legislators passed a joint resolution criticizing "the continuing flagrant violation of the civil and political human rights and the fundamental freedoms of members of the Cuban opposition and of independent journalists."

On Wednesday, Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini, whose country holds the EU presidency, told the legislature that the human rights situation continues to deteriorate on the Caribbean island.

In July, Castro said his country would no longer accept aid from the U.S., accusing it of backing the anti-Castro policy of the United States.

Some charges against naked hiker dropped

LONDON — A walker who has been repeatedly arrested for trying to stroll the length of Britain naked was given a brief respite Thursday when prosecutors in southern England dropped charges against him.

But Steve Gough, who aims to trek 847 miles wearing little more than sun screen, socks and boots, still faces charges in Scotland, where he is currently in jail awaiting trial next month.

The 44-year-old father of two, who insists it is his human right to walk naked, is due to stand trial at Dingwall Sheriff Court in the Scottish Highlands on Oct. 3 for allegedly breaching the peace. He is currently in jail in Inverness.

From The Associated Press

Rain leaves U.S. Open scrambling to close

BY HAL BOCK

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Andre Agassi and Andy Roddick could rest Thursday — they were the only men already in the quarterfinals at a wet U.S. Open.

The Open limped through another rain-soaked day Wednesday, further backing up a schedule that could stretch the tournament into next week. Only one match was completed: Roddick's three-set victory over Xavier Malisse.

Four matches were completed Monday through Wednesday.

Play was delayed again Thursday because even though the grounds were dry at 10 a.m., rain had started by the time the first match was supposed to begin at 11 a.m.

And things got worse: The Grandstand, one of three show courts at the National Tennis Center, was deemed unplayable Thursday because it couldn't be dried. The water level un-

derneath the facility's lowest-lying court is so high that the surface feels soggy even when the water on top has been wiped away, grounds crew supervisor Joe Sexton said.

"We have to wait for the sun. If it sits in the sun for 12 hours, it could be playable again," Sexton said.

Also, first-round juniors singles matches were moved to Sound Shore Indoor Tennis in Port Chester, N.Y., about 25 miles north of Flushing Meadows.

On Wednesday, the start of play was delayed by nearly three hours because of a stubborn mist that left courts damp and unplayable. When the weather cleared long enough for a match to begin, top-seeded Kim Clijsters won three games from No. 5 Amelie Mauresmo in 10 minutes.

Then it started raining again.

About seven hours later, two men's matches reached court. No. 4 Roddick was up 6-3, 2-2 against Malisse and No. 12 Sjeng Schalken had a 5-1 jump on No. 8 Rainer Schuettler when the weather

er window closed and play was halted by still another rain delay. They resumed long enough for Roddick to win 6-3, 6-4, 7-5 (5). Schalken and Schuettler returned to the court but never played another point.

"I didn't think we'd get on the court tonight," Roddick said. "It's tough, frustrating. You want to get out there. You want to play."

The tournament had ambitious plans for Wednesday, scheduling more than 100 matches in an effort to catch up. At day's end, the event was 174 matches behind where it was supposed to be, with 388 matches completed at a time when it was supposed to have finished 562. There were a record 110 matches on Thursday's schedule.

The biggest problem is on the men's side of the draw, where four fourth-round matches were suspended in progress and two never began. If the Open is to conclude as scheduled on Sunday with the men's final, it would require the men still stuck in the round-of-16 to play best-of-five matches on four straight days, a grueling schedule.

"I can't imagine playing three out of five sets two days in a row, let alone three or four, which is what it's looking like," said third-seeded Lindsay Davenport, whose quarterfinal match against No. 24 Paola Suarez was among Wednesday's postponements.

The women face an ambitious schedule of their own, with their quarterfinals scheduled for Thursday, semifinals Friday and final Saturday night.

"We continue to make our best effort to complete this tournament on time," said Arlen Kantarian, the U.S. Tennis Association's chief executive for professional tennis. "That challenge, of course, has gotten all the more challenging. We are determined to make the best of a very difficult situation."

That said, Kantarian added that inclement weather Thursday would push the entire schedule back another day, meaning the men's final would be played Monday.

The last time the Open stretched past Sunday was 1987 when rainouts forced the final to Monday.

FOOTBALL

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — While his teammates went through their paces on the practice field Wednesday, Priest Holmes was working out a lucrative new contract with the Chiefs.

Holmes and General Manager Carl Peterson announced a four-year contract extension that will probably keep Holmes in Kansas City the rest of his career and will definitely have him on the field for Sunday's season opener.

Holmes, who is coming off surgery for a hip injury that ended his season with two games left last year, had indicated he might not play against San Diego this weekend without a new deal.

He and Peterson refused to reveal terms, but Holmes had publicly talked about wanting a \$15 million extension. And he said nothing to indicate he was disappointed over not coming close to that figure.

ORCHARD PARK, N.Y. — Four-time Pro Bowl safety Lawyer Milloy agreed in principle to a deal with the Buffalo Bills, a day after the New England Patriots released him for salary cap reasons.

Milloy reportedly signed a four-year

Sports in brief

deal worth \$15 million, including a \$5 million signing bonus.

Buffalo coach Gregg Williams said he would have to first speak with Milloy before determining whether he would be ready to play in Sunday's opener against the Patriots.

BASKETBALL

INDIANAPOLIS — Rick Carlisle was hired as the Indiana Pacers' new coach, three years after the former assistant was bypassed in favor of Isiah Thomas.

Carlisle, coach of the Detroit Pistons the past two years, was fired by the Pistons in May. He was the first choice for the Pacers after new president Larry Bird, his former Boston teammate, fired Thomas last month.

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

AUSTIN, Texas — Texas Gov. Rick Perry signed a warrant seeking the extradition of former Baylor basketball player Carlton Dotson from Maryland.

Dotson is accused of murder in the death of Patrick Dennehy, his former teammate. Dotson has been indicted by a McLennan County grand jury and the district attorney's office asked Perry to seek his return from his home state.

The formal extradition request was sent to Maryland Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich.

AUBURN, Ala. — The NCAA formally notified Auburn it is investigating possible major rules violations in the men's basketball program, including accusations of improper offers to recruits.

The university has received a letter detailing the accusations, which involve one former and one current assistant coach, school spokesman John Hachtel said. The coaches were not identified.

AUTO RACING

ROME — Formula One driver Ralf Schumacher left a Milan hospital, a day after his car flipped over during testing at the Monza racetrack.

Schumacher planned to return to his home in Salzburg, Austria, to rest and is expected to race in the Sept. 14 Italian Grand Prix at Monza, said Thomas Hofmann, who represents the Williams-BMW driver.

HOCKEY

BOSTON — Felix Potvin agreed to a contract with the Boston Bruins. Potvin joins his fifth team for his 13th NHL season. He played 42 games for the Kings last season with a 17-20-3 record before a knee injury on Jan. 28 ended his season.

RALEIGH, N.C. — The Carolina Hurricanes re-signed center Josef Vasicek to a one-year contract. Terms of the deal were not announced.

SOCCER

CARSON, Calif. — The Los Angeles Galaxy and China's national team played a 0-0 tie in an exhibition game. Dan Popik made two saves for the Galaxy, while Chinese goalkeeper Li Jian made three saves.

Continued on Page 9

Report: Armstrong, wife to divorce

Five-time Tour de France champion Lance Armstrong and his wife have separated and are planning to divorce, according to a published report.

Armstrong and wife Kristin separated two weeks ago, soon after they moved back to Austin, Texas, from their European home in Girona, Spain, according to a story published in Thursday editions of the Austin American-Statesman.

The couple is currently in mediation to reach a divorce settlement, while maintaining separate homes in Austin, the newspaper reported.

"It's an unfortunate situation," Kristin Armstrong, 32, told the Statesman. "We are making the best of it for the sake of our kids."

The Armstrongs have been married for five years and separated in late January. The 31-year-old cyclist, who grabbed his record-tying fifth straight victory in cycling's most prestigious race this summer, later agreed to enter counseling in an effort to salvage their marriage.

Armstrong's wife and children — 3-year-old Luke and 22-month-old twins Isabelle and Grace — were with the cyclist in Paris on July 27 to celebrate his Tour victory.

Clooney jumps at wedding offer

George Clooney may be single, but he said "I do" on Wednesday — well, sort of — when propositioned during a news conference at the Venice Film Festival in Venice, Italy.

Clooney was answering questions about his new film "Intolerable Cruelty," also starring Catherine Zeta-Jones, when an Italian TV journalist sporting a white veil asked him to marry her.

Faces 'n' places

"All right, come here," Clooney replied.

The woman approached the dais, bringing along a cameraman doubling as a priest who also produced two rings.

"Finally, finally married!" Clooney said, although he added: "My fear is that he really is a priest."

Clooney kissed the journalist, laughed and had a sip of celebratory wine before moving on: "Next question?"

"Intolerable Cruelty," the Coen brothers' latest film, stars Clooney as a divorce lawyer and Zeta-Jones as "serial divorcee."

Rumor: Ben and Jen to wed Sept. 14

This time, it's not official.

But it might as well be — unidentified sources told the New York Daily News and Us Weekly magazine that Jennifer Lopez and Ben Affleck will finally tie the knot on Sept. 14.

Affleck's publicist, Ken Sunshine, refused to comment Wednesday about any wedding plans.

But very close "friends" and an intimate "source" told the newspaper and the magazine, respectively, that the couple plan to exchange vows near Santa Barbara.

The 33-year-old Lopez has been married twice: to waiter Ojani Noa in 1997 and to dancer Cris Judd in 2001.

Noa lasted a little more than a year; Judd for nine months.

It's the first time down the aisle for Affleck, 31.

Ear disappears

Magician and endurance artist David Blaine has turned to sleight of hand, apparently lopping off part of his ear in front of reporters.

The stunt took place Monday during a London news conference to promote Blaine's latest feat, a six-week stint in a plastic box suspended above the River Thames.

The 30-year-old New Yorker appeared to hack at his ear with a knife after a reporter asked him to perform a trick. He left the news conference with blood apparently streaming from his head and returned to show an ear that looked like it was missing a chunk.

Woody: No U.S. legend

Woody Allen disagrees with those who think he's a Hollywood legend.

The director and actor famed for playing neurotic characters said Tuesday that his star power is far greater outside the United States and that few up-and-coming American filmmakers want to emulate him.

"In my country, I have a small, loyal following — very loyal, very small," said Allen, who was in Paris to promote his new film "Anything Else." "By most people in the United States, I am very reluctantly acknowledged as someone who has been around for a long time and they frankly can't understand what the fuss is about — when there's a fuss."

"They're kind but very, very unimpressed," Allen, 67, said about the majority of American moviegoers.

From wire reports

Cubs 8, Cardinals 7

CHICAGO — Moises Alou had a career-high five hits, including a go-ahead single in the eighth inning that capped a comeback from a six-run deficit and led Chicago over St. Louis.

Before Wednesday's game, Alou was still angry over an umpire's call that the Cubs felt cost them the second game of Tuesday's doubleheader.

Alou had four RBIs in a tension-filled game that included a shouting match between managers and the two starting pitchers hitting each other with pitches.

Mark Grudzielanek hit an RBI triple in the eighth and scored on Alou's single. Both hits came off Woody Williams (14-8), making his first relief appearance since June 6, 1996.

Chicago began Wednesday 1½ games behind the NL Central-leading Cardinals.

Joe Borowski (2-2) retired the final four St. Louis batters.

Giants 7, Rockies 6

SAN FRANCISCO — Pinch-runner Eric Young avoided a tag at the plate to score the winning run in the ninth on Edgardo Alfonzo's sacrifice fly off Brian Fuentes (3-2), beating the throw by right fielder Larry Walker.

Even four homers could not save the Rockies from matching a club record with their 10th straight road loss.

Joe Nathan (9-3) pitched one inning as the Giants won their fifth straight game and reduced their magic number for clinching the NL West to 13.

Phillies 8, Expos 3

PHILADELPHIA — Jim Thome homered and drove in two runs to back Kevin Millwood (14-9), who struck out eight in eight innings as Philadelphia won for the fifth time in six games.

Philadelphia began the day tied with Florida in the NL wild-card race.

Montreal went ahead on Wil Cordero's three-run homer in the first but lost its sixth straight after a five-game

National League

winning streak and dropped five games behind the Phillies.

T.J. Tucker (0-2) allowed six runs in 2½ innings, but five runs were unearned because of an error by third baseman Jamey Carroll.

Mets 9, Braves 3

NEW YORK — Jorge Velazquez hit a two-run triple off Russ Ortiz (18-6) and an RBI double a day after being called up from the minors as New York completed its first sweep of Atlanta since Sept. 29-Oct. 1, 1995.

Roger Cedeno broke an 0-for-18 slump with two hits and also drove in a run, and Steve Trachsel (14-8) allowed one run in eight innings and added an RBI single in a steady drizzle.

Atlanta tied a season high with four errors, and four of New York's runs were unearned.

Marlins 3, Pirates 0

MIAMI — Josh Beckett (7-7) won for just the second time in seven starts, allowing three hits over 7½ innings and hitting an RBI single in the fifth.

Ugueth Urbina got four outs for his 28th save as the Marlins stopped a four-game losing streak to the Pirates.

Josh Fogg (8-8) allowed three runs — two earned — and seven hits in six innings.

Padres 12, Diamondbacks 0

SAN DIEGO — Gary Matthews Jr. hit a two-run triple to highlight the seven-run second inning as San Diego swept a two-game series and handed Arizona its fifth straight loss.

The Diamondbacks, who started the day four games back in the wild-card race, have lost 14 of their past 20, including four straight to the Padres, who have the NL's worst record.

Brian Lawrence (8-14) and two relievers combined on a five-hit shutout. Lawrence allowed four hits in seven innings to win his third straight start.

Miguel Batista (9-8) lasted just four innings.

Brewers 9, Reds 6

MILWAUKEE — Brady Clark hit a home run, a triple, a double and scored four runs as Milwaukee beat Cincinnati for its 14th victory in 16 games.

Clark, 3-for-4 with two RBIs, flied out to right field in the bottom of the eighth inning, missing his first career cycle by just a single. Richie Sexson had three RBIs for the Brewers.

Russell Branyan hit his seventh home run for the Reds.

Leo Estrella (6-2) allowed a two-run single before getting the last out of the seventh for the victory. Mike Crudale pitched the eighth, and Danny Kolb pitched a perfect ninth for his 16th consecutive save.

Reliever Scott Randall (0-1), took the loss, failing to retire any of the four batters he faced in the seventh.

Astros 8, Dodgers 2

LOS ANGELES — Jeriome Robertson set a franchise record for victories by a rookie left-hander as Houston downed Los Angeles.

The victory moves the Astros into first place in the NL Central — a half-game ahead of St. Louis and one game in front of Chicago.

The loss was just the second in seven games for the Dodgers, who fell 2½ games behind co-leaders Philadelphia and Florida in the NL wild-card race.

Robertson (13-7) gave up five hits and two runs in 5½ innings while walking none and striking out six. He had been tied with Jim Deshaies for the club record for most victories by a rookie left-hander.

Deshaies was 12-5 in 1986. Kevin Brown (13-8) allowed six hits and four runs in seven innings while walking one and striking out five.

From The Associated Press

Scores/standings

American League

East Division					GB
	W	L	Pct		
New York	83	54	.606	—	
Boston	81	58	.583	3	
Toronto	69	69	.500	14½	
Baltimore	62	76	.449	21½	
Tampa Bay	54	83	.394	29	
Central Division					GB
	W	L	Pct		
Chicago	73	66	.525	—	
Minnesota	73	66	.525	—	
Kansas City	71	66	.518	1	
Cleveland	62	78	.443	11½	
Detroit	36	102	.261	36½	
West Division					GB
	W	L	Pct		
Oakland	83	56	.597	—	
Seattle	81	58	.583	2	
Anaheim	67	72	.482	16	
Texas	64	76	.457	19½	

Wednesday's games

Minnesota 6, Anaheim 5
Toronto 4, N.Y. Yankees 3
Baltimore 9, Oakland 10
Detroit 6, Cleveland 5, 11 innings
Boston 5, Chicago White Sox 4, 10 innings
Tampa Bay 7, Seattle 0
Kansas City 3, Texas 1

National League

East Division					GB
	W	L	Pct		
Atlanta	87	52	.626	—	
Florida	75	64	.540	12	
Philadelphia	75	64	.540	12	
Montreal	71	70	.504	17	
New York	62	76	.449	24½	
Central Division					GB
	W	L	Pct		
Houston	73	66	.525	—	
St. Louis	73	67	.521	½	
Chicago	72	67	.518	1	
Pittsburgh	63	73	.463	8½	
Milwaukee	62	77	.446	11	
Cincinnati	60	79	.432	13	
West Division					GB
	W	L	Pct		
San Francisco	85	53	.616	—	
Los Angeles	72	66	.522	13	
Arizona	70	69	.504	15½	
Colorado	65	76	.461	21½	
San Diego	57	82	.410	28½	

Wednesday's games

N.Y. Mets 9, Atlanta 3
Chicago Cubs 8, St. Louis 7
Philadelphia 8, Montreal 3
San Francisco 7, Colorado 6
San Diego 12, Arizona 0
Florida 3, Pittsburgh 0
Milwaukee 9, Cincinnati 6
Houston 8, Los Angeles 2

From The Associated Press

Red Sox 5, White Sox (10)

CHICAGO — David Ortiz homered in consecutive at-bats Wednesday, including a solo shot in the 10th inning to give Boston a victory over Chicago.

Ortiz finished with four RBIs, matching his career and season highs. Manny Ramirez went 2-for-4 with a run scored in his first game back in the lineup after being benched.

It was the 10th victory in 13 games for Boston, which began the day four games behind New York in the AL East race and a half-game behind Seattle for the wild-card.

Ortiz hit a two-run homer off of Scott Sullivan in the eighth for a 4-3 lead and then homered off Tom Gordon (6-6) in the 10th.

Byung-Hyun Kim (7-4) gave up two hits in two innings.

Orioles 9, Athletics 0

BALTIMORE — Rodrigo Lopez pitched a seven-hitter as Baltimore battered Tim Hudson and ended Oakland's 10-game winning streak.

The A's committed a season-high five errors, and Hudson (14-5) was pulled after allowing five runs and eight hits in three innings — his shortest stint of the year.

The victory ended a nine-game skid for the Orioles, who entered 0-7 against Oakland and 0-7 against Hudson. Larry Bigbie hit a three-run homer for Baltimore.

Lopez (7-9) was 0-2 with a 6.55 ERA in two starts against Oakland this year, but only allowed one runner past second in his first shutout and third complete game of the season.

Blue Jays 4, Yankees 3

TORONTO — Josh Phelps hit a two-run homer and Eric Hinske hit a

American League

go-ahead sacrifice fly in the seventh inning as Toronto rallied from a three-run deficit to beat New York.

Phelps hit a two-run homer in the fourth off Mike Mussina in the fourth that cut New York's lead to 3-2.

After Vernon Wells singled off Antonio Osuna (2-5) in the seventh, Myers doubled off Gabe White. Phelps was intentionally walked and Hinske hit his sacrifice fly.

Jason Kershner (1-3) pitched two innings for his first major league victory, and Aquilino Lopez got the last out for his eighth save in 10 chances.

Twins 6, Angels 5

MINNEAPOLIS — Catcher Bengie Molina failed to hold onto a throw with two outs in the ninth inning, allowing the tying and winning runs to score on the error as Minnesota beat Anaheim.

Shannon Stewart lined a shot off Troy Percival (0-5) down the left-field line. Garrett Anderson's throw home beat pinch-runner Dustan Mohr, but Mohr collided with Molina, who couldn't hold onto the ball.

Stewart then came home with the winning run. Eddie Guardado (2-5) pitched two-thirds of an inning for Minnesota, which moved into a tie with Chicago for the division lead, one game ahead of Kansas City. It's the first time the Twins have held a share of the lead since after games of June 30.

Royals 3, Rangers 1

ARLINGTON, Texas — Rookie Jimmy Gobble pitched seven solid innings as Kansas City snapped a four-game losing streak by beating Texas.

Mike Sweeney, Joe Randa and Carlos Beltran each had RBIs in a three-run fourth to help the Royals move within

one game of both Chicago and Minnesota for the AL Central lead.

Gobble (3-3) allowed one run and four hits, struck out six and walked two after being called up from Triple-A Omaha on Tuesday to join the expanded roster.

Mike MacDougal got for his 27th save in 35 chances.

Rangers starter John Thomson (12-12) gave up three runs in seven innings. He struck out eight and walked one.

Devil Rays 7, Mariners 0

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — Doug Waechter became the first Tampa Bay pitcher to throw a shutout in his first major league start, leading the Devil Rays over Seattle.

Waechter (2-0), who threw just 100 pitches, went to high school four miles from Tropicana Field and pitched in front of more than 100 friends and family members. Among those in attendance was his mother, Nancy Waechter, who celebrated her birthday at the ballpark.

Seattle starter Freddy Garcia (11-13) allowed five runs and seven hits over five innings. He had been 6-0 against Tampa Bay.

Tigers 6, Indians 5 (11)

DETROIT — Shane Halter hit a leadoff homer in the 11th inning to lift Detroit over Cleveland.

The Tigers (36-102) have won two straight and need seven victories in their final 24 games to avoid matching the 1962 Mets' post-1900 record of 120 losses.

Halter homered off Jose Santiago (1-2) on the second pitch of the inning, making a winner of Jamie Walker (4-3), who got the final two outs in the top of the inning. Detroit improved to 2-11 in extra innings.

From The Associated Press

Sports in brief continued

Continued from Page 8

BOXING

SYDNEY, Australia — Former Australian rugby league player Anthony Mundine won the vacant WBA super middleweight title with a unanimous decision over Antwon Echols of the United States.

TRACK AND FIELD

PARIS — U.S. sprinter Kelli White will not be suspended from track meets for taking a stimulant but still could be stripped of the two gold medals she won at the World Championships.

The IAAF will review White's medical records Monday and decide whether she committed a doping offense, Istvan Gulai, general secretary of track and field's governing body, said.

If the International Association of Athletics Federations rules against her, it will ask the U.S. federation to begin disciplinary procedures.

White, who won the 100 and 200 meters at the World Championships, automatically will lose her medals if the U.S. federation determines she committed a doping offense.

She plans on running the 100 meters at a meet in Belgium on Friday.

From The Associated Press